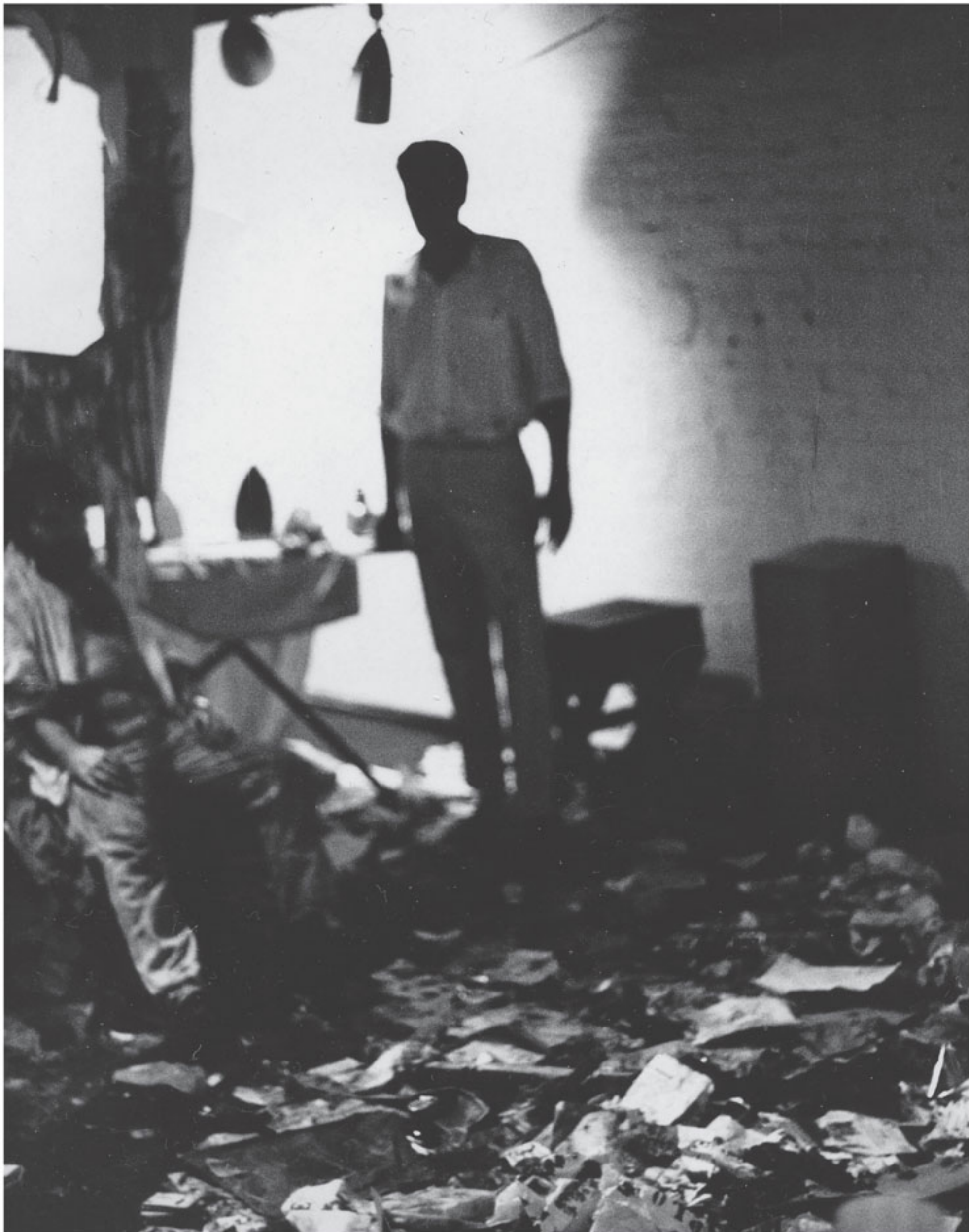




LASER/DISC/SCRATCH/DESTRUCTION
RAPHAEL MONTAÑEZ ORTÍZ

Edited by Pedro Reyes



Laser/Disc/Scratch/Destruction: Raphael Montañez Ortiz
Curated by Pedro Reyes
April 5th – May 21st, 2011

**Laser/Disc/Scratch/Destruction: Raphael Montañez Ortiz
and Pedro Reyes in Conversation**
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RALPH ORTIZ... armed with an axe he attacked a green, upright piano.



... he wants to give us greater insight into certain emotions and to exorcise them.

Joan Lowndes, "Art: Destruction Theater - A shock spectacle with moral motive," *The Province* (Vancouver, B.C.), August 28, 1968.

Tearing it all apart in a sense solves two shamanic problems: one is to move the spirits back into their proper place and to release the materials back into nature; it's like nature is beckoning for them.

PR: So it's like a chemical process, to think about how a substance can accumulate or be transformed.

RMO: Yes, it's also a spiritual process; it's a shamanic process. But within the shamanic context there is this alchemy, this transmutiveness when you take a piece of furniture and you release the spirits that are contained within it. But beyond that, it's returning the materials back to the nature that they've been captured from and have imprisoned in this object. Tearing it all apart in a sense solves two shamanic problems: one is to move the spirits back into their proper place and to release the materials back into nature; it's like nature is beckoning for them.

PR: I'm very interested in this notion of a kind of counter-anthropology where art becomes the space where the Western man has access to this catharsis that is otherwise cancelling modern life.

RMO: That's fundamental to the shamanic process; it's redemption, it's reconciling oneself in terms of nature as this churning within life and death, and

that in a sense however much you wish to control it, it controls you. In order to gain some sense of control, you then compensate by saying 'I will give you something other than myself to keep you busy.'

PR: Can you elaborate on that?

RMO: Well, nature works on us and we want to defend ourselves from it, so we give nature something else to distract it. For instance, in some cultures, in order for the spirits not to haunt you in your dreams, you would have two paintings. On one side you would have flowers and a beautiful country scene, and on the other side, a pornographic image, and you would turn them over at night so that the spirits would be busy spending all their time with the pornographic images and leave you alone. So again, it's displacing, it's moving away, distracting away from yourself; the way a magician works.

PR: Do you think that we need to express or experience violence in our lives?

RMO: In a sense what you're referring

to is the early brain because our brain architecture is this building that's sort of like a ship that builds itself on the ocean, hopefully without sinking. It rebuilds itself, and so evolution in a sense is that with our species, except the previous fifteen models have all exterminated each other. We're on the sixteenth model and hopefully we'll overcome this ancient brain, which is where the chimpanzee begins. Chimpanzees are not these funny little things with diapers on TV, smoking cigars or playing poker. They're savage beasts; they rip each other apart. They're horrible, they're gang bangers from the beginning of civilization.

Later on we build on that, whether it be australopithecine, naturobilis, archaic-sapiens, sapiens-sapiens and in 180,000 years we haven't done much more in terms of our cognitive potential. So within that framework you get a sense of the savage, barbaric potential that we have, it's there built into our architecture. You can see how around the world a culture can focus the whole cultural process and cognition around that architecture. You have some cultures that focus themselves on this ancient architecture and so they have this ancient cognitiveness, this primalness about the way they solve things. The artist, our culture – a lot of our culture – has the ancient brain. So if we're wondering why we are so savage, how can we be so barbaric? The answer is simple; our culture has opened that possibility and cognition to us.

PR: This reminds me of what you mentioned in one of your manifestos, about the need for having unconscious integrity. So these different architectures, where some of them, like the most primitive ones, call us for a need to have a space for violence or cruelty in our lives.

RMO: Yes, but it must be displaced in terms of object. In other words, to be conscious of it, you have to take it somewhere where they're objects; it's sort of like play therapy. Instead of the child burning the parents' house down, they make little fires and start understanding their relationship to fire and controlling it.

It's like the notion of moving from human sacrifice to flowers and butterflies; I believe that was in Mexico, which was a very important transition.

PR: Yes, "Las guerras floridas", wars that were fought without having to kill people, using non-lethal weapons like sticks and whips. It's like the ancient version of Paintball. What I find fascinating is that, for the mind, a symbolic act has the

same weight as a real act. So if you have a space where you can "kill" someone symbolically that might actually prevent you from having to go and kill that person. This is a concept that Antanas Mockus used in Bogota when he created the Vaccine against Violence.

RMO: Yes, but there has to be introspection, lucid intellect involved in the process. In other words, if the catharsis happens for its own sake, it reinforces the object of catharsis and empathy doesn't occur. You have to have a lucid introspective intellectual involvement and say 'this is one of my potentials in terms of my human development over this period of evolution over millions of years.' So being in the present, understanding how can I now use all of this prefrontal potential I have, to objectify the abstract, to be able to understand my relationship objectively away from these ancient redemptive ways of reconciling.

There are new ways of reconciling, like you said, even beyond the notion of the paint guns. We can fence with words and language; we can argue. There's a more civilized framework within which we can do all of this. So it's not just simply a question of opening up an arena where everybody can run in and destroy pianos, furniture and whatever else. But there has to be some introspective insight that it's more civil than people beating on each other. You have all these relationships that end tragically with all sorts of violence. That's the ancient brain, that's the chimpanzee in us, leading us.

PR: So this is an awareness that comes about through art, what is your own experience with this?

RMO: The organizing whole aesthetic framework for it came out of my Masters of Fine Arts thesis, where I had to sit down and really think 'what am I doing?' I'd read a lot of anthropology and psychology and sociology, I did special research into the ancient shamanic, Frazer's, *The Golden Bough*¹ is one of the strong influences. They explain how some cultures moved away from the idea of needing more flesh and blood for reconciliation, onto simply cutting down a tree for instance. Finally the notion of moving from a human being to a chicken is a radical leap within a kind of more civilized notion of redemption within that primitive cognitiveness.

In my thesis I recognize that artists were spending all of their time within certain moral, ethical issues, issues

1 *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* is a comparative study on religion and myth, written by Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941).

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...our brain architecture is this building that's like a ship that builds itself on the ocean, hopefully without sinking.

In later performances I would pass around an egg and have them put their sins into it, all of their failings, all of their horrible thoughts and nightmares, and then they would smash the egg onto the piano and so it would go into the piano...

As soon as he walked just three feet away, I jumped on the chair and screamed at the chair and jumped up and down and threw the chair open and I wrestled with the it all over the floor and I ripped and tore and kicked it...

of constructing things. But the real critical issue as I saw it was destruction. It seemed to be that kind of razor's edge within which civilization would maintain balance.

PR: In the events where these destructions were taking place, how would the transformation that you were showing come across to the audience?

RMO: In the early versions, the audience would simply witness the sacrifice. In a sense they were redeemed, hearing all the sounds and seeing the piano in a sense die. In later performances, I would pass around an egg and have them put their sins into it, all of their failings, all of their horrible thoughts and nightmares, and then they would smash the egg onto the piano and so it would go into the piano; that way they would have more direct participation.

PR: Do you feel that the other artists that were taking place in the Destruction in Art Symposium², were sharing your same vision of the role of destruction?

RMO: The dialogue was generally from artists who were more subtly involved and didn't think of it within that scary context of the history of human beings on this planet. They saw it simply as kind of a critique, but not this kind of digging into the psyche. An example is when Yoko Ono came off the plane and I had already done a number of these destructions with furniture and I explained one of the pieces I did. I bought a chair at one of these clubs where upper-middle class people used to go to read the newspaper. After I bought the chair, the performance was on the following day I held a press conference downstairs in their office and we talked about the Destruction in Art Symposium in London 1966. Then, I said 'I'm going to go upstairs and do a performance' and all the newspaper people came upstairs and John Latham and number of artists who were participating were there. So we went upstairs and there was a person sitting there reading a newspaper in my chair, and I said to him, 'Excuse me but you're sitting in *my* chair, and I'm asking you to get up from *my* chair.' And he looked at me and said, 'how could this be your chair?' I said, 'because I own this chair.' And so a whole narrative was unfolding. He then called someone over and said, 'this gentleman says that this is his chair.' And the person said, 'Just a moment sir' and went to the person

managing, and he came back and said, 'Yes it is his chair.' And so he folded his newspaper, he got up and walked away.

As soon as he walked just three feet away, I jumped on the chair and screamed at the chair and jumped up and down and threw the chair open and I wrestled with the it all over the floor and I ripped and tore and kicked it and everyone ran, everyone that was sitting around just ran to the sides. So I created this spontaneous performance within that context. I was ripping and tearing and they were taking photos all over the place and then of course all of the headlines appeared and in the Vanguard they gave me half a page.

PR: You didn't use an ax then?

RMO: No, not for that. The ax used for the pianos, this was hand-to-hand combat. So Yoko Ono, that night we're conferencing and she comes onto the stage and says, "There's nothing important about destroying a chair, it should be more subtle." It was competitive, and I think that as an American I had an advantage. We're less shy about understanding the role of destruction within culture and within society and within one's sense of power in the world.

PR: But even in a moment where it was unheard of that this could be an art form?

RMO: Yes, Gustav Metzger³, one of the prime organizers, and some really smart people who had done their homework, understood that it was one of the archaic aspects of our identity and it somehow needed to be understood and evolve. And that as artists it was important for us to not spend all our time just making things because the moral ethical framework of making doesn't challenge that unmaking ability we have. Finally, the unmaking is not savage, it is civilized, which means it removes itself from unmaking life.

PR: What would happen with the leftovers of this process?

RMO: It's an installation.

PR: You were in New York when you started to exhibit, how did these actions make their way into the museum?

RMO: Well it was recognized as an aesthetic framework that challenged "making" —number one— and curators

² The Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS) was founded in 1966 by artists Gustav Metzger and John Sharkey in London. It was a collective of artists, writers and scientists focused on Happenings and on the role of destruction in art.

³ Born in 1926, Metzger was one of the founding artists of the Destruction in Art Symposium.

Right Page: Archaeological Find #33, 1965, Mommy Mattress on wooden backing. Collection of the Artist.



and art historians are always curious about what is going on and what aesthetic frameworks are driving a particular movement.

PR: So the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) acquired your first sculpture in 1962, could you tell me about that?

RMO: The mattress? It was my master's thesis, and a culmination of all those understandings of the shamanic framework. I was looking for an aesthetic framework that was not Eurocentric, that found its meaning in my roots. I had a grandfather who was half Irish and half Yaqui—the Eurocentric sort of Irish and then the Yaqui, which, was the shamanic context. I saw that as the door to step through.

So here I am in my apartment and saying 'what am I going to begin to destroy?' I had the mattress on the floor, a real student minimal structure, and I'm sitting and I said, 'I'll use my mattress, it's a made thing, I've lived on it, it has lots of spirit—mine and other people's'—and I can somehow connect all these ideas with this.

PR: What happened next?

RMO: I had a studio in Coney Island, took the mattress down to the beach and I threw some acid on it along with some lighter fluid, I lit it on fire, tore it all a part, pulled the springs out, ripped the covering off it, most of it had burned and then I sunk it and I thought let nature work on this sacrifice. People were wondering what I was doing and I'm there saying 'it's an artwork,' and 'I'll be back to pick it up, it needs to cook a little bit in the ocean,' and they were all scratching their heads, 'who is this crazy person?', and I just walked away. I'd go there every once in a while to see what was going on and I didn't bother going into the water, I'd walk on some of the rocks. And then a few months later, I went and pulled it out, it was like a dead whale. It had oxidized in the water and stuff, it was beautiful, definitely like pulling a mummy out of a pit somewhere. Then, I let it dry on the beach and I took it to my studio to finish—I let all the water drain—Then I soaked resin into it I mounted it on a sheet of plywood that was in my studio and I brought to Pratt because that's where I was a graduate student. Before I took it to my place, it was there in the hall leaned against the wall, and I thought I'd shave before I leave to go to class. So I take a quick shower and I'm standing there in my underwear and shaving and I look out the window and I see someone carrying my mattress piece towards this garbage truck. The people downstairs smelled

The washing machine gurgled foam red with blood spilled into the machine by spectator participants whose flailing arms flung cups of blood onto Toche, me, the heart, the brain and the walls. The participants became more and more a part of the breathing, the heartbeat and the pounding incantation. I felt myself inside the huge brain as each layer of screen gave under my knife. It was as if I had penetrated the logical top layer to the more primitive inner brain where our predatory and destructive urges are best at home. The smoke of the burning food and sheets burned my eyes. Exploding paper bags joined with the stomping and crushing of small objects found in the room. Lil had burned through an entire sheet, one bra and two pair of shorts. Steve spread a charred mass of bananas and apples from his frying pan onto a smashed chair. Toche and I, our backs dripping blood, had slashed our way through two layers of screen. The heartbeat, breathing and incantation stopped. The lights came up. Participants once more became spectators and tip-toed out careful not to step in blood. Destruction Realizations are an attempt to communicate the Atavistic, to realize the mystique of the Voodoo and the Sacrifice: to make of our aggressive, destructive and precatory urges a sublime transcendental super-reality serving the most fundamental humanist traditions.

The heart shown has just suffered an attack. The coronary artery and its branches are highlighted by chlorophyll, as shown in the cutaway. The heart is shown in a slightly elevated position, but since human heart cannot



PART I -- Title of Realization: DESTRUCTION ROOM -- All contents in the room are to be destroyed at the audience's leisure. The audience is simply invited to destroy. ** A room full of: overstuffed furniture, chinaware, bric-a-brac and clothing (hats, suits, dresses and underwear), pictures of loved and hated ones framed or otherwise, and magazines such as Readers' Digest, Life, Time and Playboy. PART II -- BRAINWASH -- Slide projections: brain, heart, lung. Sounds: breathing, heartbeat, Zen morning prayer. -- A washing machine overflowing with soapsuds (strobe or spot light over washing machine). Sheet and underwear are pressed until they are completely scorched and burned. (Strobe or spot light over ironing boards.) -- The audience participates by joining in the burning and scorching of sheets and underwear on other ironing boards with irons. ** Slides are projected onto the first of three layers of paper screen. The slide projections are cut out of two screen layers by being operated on with a razor, animal blood being spilled onto the paper screen where the projected image is cut, as it is cut. The audience participates by splashing cups of blood on the walls and on those people cutting out the images. FOOD BURNING -- Bananas and apples are sliced into a large frying pan and cooked on an electric heater. The food is continually stirred while it scorches and burns. The audience participates by slicing up food and putting it in a second pan to burn. (Strobe or spot light over frying pans.) ALL ASPECTS OF THIS DESTRUCTION REALIZATION ENTITLED BRAINWASH OCCUR SIMULTANEOUSLY.

My concern is with a multi-dimensional, multi-sensual destruction art experience; one through which we can realize our aggressive destructive urges by aggressive destructive action. -- My event, DESTRUCTION ROOM, at Judson Gallery brought the spectator into destruction. The traditional spectator of the Happening became participant, destroying at his leisure whatever object in the room he so chose. Within the hour twenty-five to thirty participants had completely demolished the room. Furniture and crockery were bashed against the brick walls. Clothes were torn. Paper bags were exploded. I dimmed the lights and began the washing machine. Soapsuds flooded onto the ruin. The sound of highly amplified breathing and heartbeats filled the room. Lil Piccard began scorching and burning sheets and underwear on the ironing board. I began the color slide projections: A large human heart and a massive brain filled the paper screens. Steve Rose with a pile of fruit by his side began the food burning. Jean Toche turned on the Zen incantation. I handed him a gallon of blood and we proceeded to slash out the heart and brain. Cup after cup of blood drained onto the floor as the images of the heart and brain fell away. The room smelled of blood, scorched sheets and burning food.

RALPH ORTIZ

Our culture and its rituals must evolve to absorb urges which not only interfere with ours and civilizations ongoing evolution but nakedly threaten survival.

Destruction theater is specifically involved in the problems of dehumanization and survival, our purpose is to finally give to art the essential humanizing role so necessary today in a civilization more and more dominated by the machine aesthetic.

As we actively realize our most destructive and aggressive urges through displaced-symbolic, destructive, aggressive theater action, we educate ourselves to these awesome forces and their awesome possibilities and personalize an aspect of ourselves long depersonalized.

Destruction theater is intent on pushing the Fine Art beyond its now passive if not irresponsible role in civilization. Art today is a cultural appendage in service of repression and a no-nothing market system.

Destruction art is a response to the crucial issues of mankind's emotional and physical survival. The humanist intent of art is not the political posterer but the possible humanizing resolutions inherent in the art process itself. Today more than ever before these inherent possibilities must serve to intergrate our aggressive destructive urges which threaten mankind's survival.

Destruction theater is the symbolic realization of those subtle and extreme destructions which play such a dominant role in our everyday lives, from our headaches and ulcers to our murders and suicides. To realize our destructions within the framework of our art is to finally rescue ourselves and civilization from the havoc reaped by our depersonalized war psychologies.

HAPPENINGS

The worldwide underground

of the arts creates **THE**

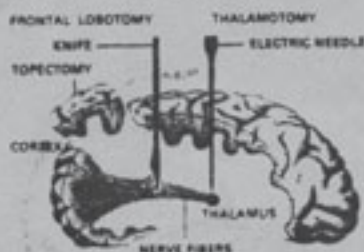
OTHER CULTURE

CEREBRAL HEMISPHERE



BRAIN SURGERY

Centuries of search for physical cures of mental disease led by the 1930s to the use of brain surgery for violent cases. In the prefrontal lobotomy, fibers between the thalamus and the cortex are cut. The topectomy is the removal of parts of the cortex. In the thalamotomy, an electric needle destroys some of the thalamus itself. Today, drugs have largely replaced brain surgery, which is now used most often in cases of unbearable pain.



THE BRAIN'S BLOOD SUPPLY

This drawing of the right hemisphere suggests the profusion of blood vessels that carry oxygen to billions of cells throughout the brain. The brain regulates its own blood flow and can keep it steady, within limits, independent of blood pressure elsewhere in the body. Those areas of the brain that govern higher intellectual activity are particularly rich in blood vessels.

the burntness, and they called up to have it removed. So I run down in my underwear and they're about to put it in the pile and I say, 'Stop, stop! It's an artwork!' They didn't know what I was saying, 'it's an artwork? What are you talking about?' I said, 'No, no, it's an artwork, please!' And they brought it back laughing, thinking these artists are crazy.

PR: The crazy zaga of the mattress!

RMO: But it didn't end there! I loaded it into my station wagon again, went to Pratt, took it upstairs, and we're all talking, giving crits and things, and everyone smells the thing and their curious what my work looks like because I was the one who did strange things. So I then go out to get my piece and bring it in and surprise everybody, they're all curious to go out and see it, but I say, 'No, no one's allowed in the hall,' and I go out and it's not there!

I look down the end of the hall and there are these firemen with fire helmets with the little oxygen thing in the back and someone had told them there was a fire in the building and they were carrying it away as a fire hazard. And I told them, 'Stop, stop!' and they wouldn't stop, so I called the professor out and he ran down the hall and said, 'Stop it's an artwork!' So again it was fascinating the whole performance aspect of it continued between made and unmade, you know what culturally is acceptable and unacceptable.

PR: That mattress is the one that went to MoMA?

RMO: Yes. And then the Whitney Museum of Art took one of the destroyed chairs, this big beautiful chair.

PR: Tell me, how did Alfred Barr⁴ become aware of your work?

RMO: What happened was that I had a show at the Bowles gallery, The gallery owner knew Richard Huelsenbeck, one of the persons that helped found Dada and brought Dada to Berlin, and he came and saw my work and he wiggled out over it and he said, 'This is where Dada should be going.'

PR: And what happened then?

RMO: What happened was that the gallery owner invited Huelsenbeck, he wiggled out over it, and he said, 'That mattress has to be in the MOMA collection.' And Huelsenbeck was a very important person within history, certainly extremely historically relevant,

Ralph Montañez Ortiz. "Destruction Theater Manifesto. Notes on performance by Ralph Ortiz". Aspen, no. 6A. Edited by Jon Hendricks. Winter 1968-69. Original format: Legal sized sheet printed on both sides, folded to make four pages.

4 Alfred Barr was the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. He was director from 1929-1943.



Ed Ginher cartoon in the *New Yorker*, November 16, 1968.

And that as artists it was important for us to not spend all our time just making things because the moral ethical framework of making doesn't challenge that unmaking ability we have.

so he knew Alfred Barr and he called him and said, 'You have to come and see this work, this work should be in your collection.' So I got a call from Barr and he said, "I saw your work and I met with Huelsenbeck, would you come down here and meet me.' So I went down to the gallery and met Alfred Barr.

PR: How old were you?

RMO: Well, 27, I think. I got back a letter saying there was unanimous acceptance of the piece. I was floating on air because Alfred Barr was the director of *the* museum of *the* world. But the day we met first I asked him, 'ok, what's next?,' and he told me, 'well, let's take it to the museum.' I said, 'OK, I have my station wagon here,' he said, 'Let's go.' So he took one end of the piece right there, we took it off the wall, loaded it into my station wagon and we drove to the MoMA. Then he said, 'I'll let you know in a month or so.' I stepped out of the elevator and I pinched myself, I mean, what artist can say Alfred Barr helped them carry their artwork into the MOMA?

I stepped out of the elevator and I pinched myself, I mean, what artist can say Alfred Barr helped them carry their artwork into the MoMA?

Well, Maybe You Just Don't Understand Art First You Go to an Iowa Slaughter House for 15 Glasses of Blood Then Take an Ax to the Old Piano and Yell 'Peace, Peace'

By William Simbro

AMID loud but empty shouts of "peace," accompanied by a sickeningly realistic portrayal of hate and bloody violence, Cornell College students and faculty recently experienced a powerful introduction to a new art form—"destruction art." On hand to direct the "destruction concert" in Mount Vernon was Ralph Ortiz, director of the Museum of Puerto Rican Culture in New York City and leading exponent of the new art form.

The audience entered the art gallery of Armstrong Hall wondering what would be destroyed. In the center of the room was an old upright piano, with 15 glasses filled with animal blood—obtained from a slaughterhouse—atop it. Paper covered the floor and one wall as protection against the "slaughter" to come. A pre-selected group in old clothes—mostly students—stood awaiting their part in the fray.

Ortiz entered, shouted "peace" and promptly put a hammerlock on Hugh Lifson, assistant professor of art at Cornell. This signaled a pushing, grabbing wrestling match among the participants as they jostled startled members of the audience. All the while they shouted "peace" at the top of their lungs.

Ortiz threw a glassful of blood at Lifson's face. Soon the participants were all blood-soaked as the wrestling and shouting contin-

(Continued on page 8)



THE ARTIST, Ralph Ortiz, is pictured here in full swing in the midst of his recital, which grew more and more fortissimo. One listener reported hearing "some quite fascinating sounds," but then he didn't happen to own the piano.

(Register photographs by Bob Strempe)



SYMPHONIC SOUNDS at this point included the pianissimo splashing of animal blood and the delicate pizzicato of ripping shirts and pants. This concert number is not to be confused with the classic "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks" by Richard Strauss.



AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ran, as you might say, rampant—as what didn't? Such participation was both voluntary and involuntary. Here the artist, shouting "peace," has just grabbed Hugh Lifson (wearing belt), assistant professor of art at Cornell.

DES MOINES SUNDAY REGISTER—NOVEMBER 9, 1967—PAGE 7



News Reel (Film Still). 16mm; 1' 45"; b/w; sound. 1958.

So I got this medicine bag and I had a tomahawk and I just hacked it doing a chant and I randomly spliced the chards together, releasing the evil and put the whole film together like that.

FIRST FILMS (1957-) AND FIRST VIDEOS (1982-)

PR: And then you went on doing more performances and destructions, including the candy period, but at the same time you were doing films?

RMO: Yes, in 1957 I had a couple photography exhibitions where I also showed my films with groups. In about '56 I had a real sense of taking things apart and releasing the evil, releasing the spirits that were somehow damaging. So I went and bought a 16mm reel of one of these Winchester, cowboy-Indian films. I related to it because my great-grandmother was Yaqui and that was the woman on one side and the Irish sailor was on the other side of that relationship. So I got this medicine bag and I had a tomahawk and I just hacked it doing a chant, and I randomly spliced the chards together, releasing the evil and put the whole film together like that. Many films followed after that.

PR: So, you were known in the world of experimental cinema even before your destruction performances during the 60s and 70s? Your first films are from 1957, yet it wasn't until the 80s that you found a new medium using laser discs and computers. In the exhibition we are focusing on your video works from the 80s and I was

curious about how you decided to enter this new territory.

RMO: It was the first Apple computer that I used, this is 1982, I had this idea of making the computer dream; to break down its psyche, get inside its unconscious. So one day we connected a laser player to the computer. I had this big Mitsubishi, and I'm looking at the laser disc that I was digitizing, and hitting the button for forward and back, and I said, 'wait a second, there's something here that reminds of when I chopped up films in the fifties.' It was difficult to do scratching with laser video discs, so I worked with some of the computer science people in the university to build an interface with a joystick.

PR: Its important to highlight that you discovered an entirely new way of messing with moving images, very different from the cut and paste process of editing.

RMO: Yes, the Mitsubishi interface had a paddle to change the speed and change the scratch. So I was scratching with the paddles and with different speeds I could scratch forward and I could scratch back, jumping through the frames and for me that was a big discovery and I was doing it in real time. And of course after some time, I was dreaming like that.

PR: What I find fascinating is that it is as if you were zooming into time; a microscope not into space but into time, as if you were breaking



News Reel (Film Still). 16mm; 1' 45"; b/w; sound. 1958.

down the molecular structure of the narrative.

RMO: Exactly, to get inside of it. On the surface it's like a dance, but underneath there's something else and you feel it. At the time I was reading a lot on physiology and perception, especially experiments in the air force, when they were studying why a lot of pilots were crashing, losing a sense of space.

PR: Because what also happens with the scratches is that they are fundamentally different from the loop, the loop starts and ends at the same point so it's like a still life; a butterfly held by a needle. But your scratch videos have life because they are moving backwards and forwards...

RMO: Yes you are constantly re-experiencing it but not from the same perspective, it's as if you were constantly shifting around, it shifts around time and space in a way that is constantly revealing something new and a sound structure that deceives. The pieces come together differently so that you hear that difference and that's part of taking you in a different place in time and space.

PR: You are cracking not only the time structure but also the cultural cannon of the film.

RMO: Yes, the rhythm helps to do this, and besides, seeing you hear something new, you invent words.

PR: For example, in *What is this?* (1985), the mother is saying 'PUT THAT DOWN GINA' but by means of the scratching what you hear is "PUTAPUTAPUTA" and "VAGINAVAGINA". It has a very strong sexual element.

RMO: Yes, and that's part of the libido process, it's plastic, it's moving, that's the motion, the spastic motion is the sense of losing control within that orgasmic framework I would say if you could think of it as an aesthetic framework.

PR: Like an exorcism?

RMO: Work itself is sort of an erotic process, but I would say it's more libidinous than just simply erotic, I think it's the life force that is more dynamic. It's just that we don't pay attention to anything outside the sexual, or violence for that matter.

PR: Tell me about the psychology of that spastic pulsation...

RMO: Well it's an entrancement that initiates all kinds of imagining dictated by our content, but the content within the deconstruction is constantly dying and living. In other words, the experience fades and is suddenly revived, it's a revival that you can't help.

PR: Some particular pieces, like *The Kiss* (1985) feel very hysterical.

RMO: That's right and that's part of

...the spastic motion is the sense of losing control within that orgasmic framework...



The Kiss (Film Still). 3/4 inch video, 5' 29"; b/w; sound. 1985.

What I do instead is to take three seconds of found footage and put you through that entire experience without having to have people slaughtered.

the whole deconstructing sense of lucidity, where suddenly things are no longer lucid; they're ridiculous and you know it's a kind of hysteria built into that. I had to take this very static lineal construction and reveal the visceralness that is at the center of life itself.

PR: So art, as mankind's finest paradox, is where we can access some kind of "creative destruction" of "destructive creativity"?

RMO: Yes, because our familiar way of communicating is much more controlled and much more contained. The only time we have that kind of release is when we are totally hysterical or totally angry.

PR: What do you think of the use of violence in films and television?

RMO: Film often places you in a situation of threat; cars are tumbling, you're racing, you're going back and the attempt to displace perception now is through this endless car chase, car chases are very central because it's the eyes moving through this space and constant threat and constant danger.

PR: It's a very cheap trick but nevertheless they keep using it.

RMO: Yes and it works. But that can only take you so far. How many people do you have to see slaughtered, how

much blood has to splatter, how many automobiles have to spin and crash? What I do instead is to take three seconds of found footage and put you through that entire experience without having to have people slaughtered. But cinema is still to arrive at that point. It's trying to arrive at that point.

El Museo del Barrio and the portable museum

PR: I would like us to talk now about the museum and the founding of El Museo del Barrio. Do you think it is a different framework when you start with a museum, or how do you trace it back to these early interests?

RMO: Well, during my studies, I understood the relationship of culture and these institutions and how it affirms certain cultural values and not others and how they are founded by people who are speaking to the value, the richness and the superiority of their culture. One of the things I recognized as an artist was the difficulty that I was having—although I did have successes—as being one of the first early Latinos to have that kind of fame and to have works in all these collections. So then I am teaching at Music and Art, the only Puerto Rican, although there were some other Latinos there. I say Puerto Rican because my mother was born in Puerto Rico and my father was born in Portugal and they both came here when they were very young. So there's this whole blend of culture and living on the Lower East Side we were the only Latino family in those years.

So there I was, I graduated, I had my MFA, I was involved in a serious career as an artist but I had to pay the rent, so I decided it would be important for me to teach something I love. So I was teaching and the principle came down to me that the local superintendent had contacted him and that he had received a lot of requests from the community for some kind of Puerto Rican project (the demographic of the community at that point was 90% Puerto Rican.) So, my mother being born in Puerto Rico, my father's father being Irish and his mother Yaqui configured itself in this complex way, but there I was representing the Puerto Rican community. So he says, you're an artist and perhaps you can be helpful to arriving at some sort of project that would serve the Puerto Rican community, culturally. So I met with him and said I have some ideas, but I want to get them all written down and I'll meet with you in a couple of weeks I'll have a proposal. I went home and started thinking, what sort of project? We need something more important, more permanent, something that would give more integrity to the folk culture because the underclass culture is clearly a folk culture. It was very clear to me that the underclass, the Puerto Rican poor, which finally I understood as

the Latino poor, were disenfranchised, didn't have the educational opportunities to develop the intellect or complexity of problem solving. You have a high school drop out rate that's just beyond belief. In other words, it's an anti-intellectual framework, it's very emotional, body-felt, it's folk.

So that culture needed to have integrity. It needed its value within the integrity of the role played in the disenfranchised population. I was from that population but I wasn't going to stay there and it was very clear in my mind that I was going to have some class mobility that depended on my developing an intelligence and a professional status. Having gone through that process, I felt that was what the *Museo* was to do. I was angry at the fact that folk culture was seen as less of value to the larger more evolved culture, simply out of racism.

PR: So what was the response of the superintendent to your proposal?

RMO: He was overwhelmed, he said, 'I just asked for a project and you bring me a museum.' I said, 'Well the museum will be something that lasts it will be there it will get funding and it has an educational component that's very important into the public school system that deals with the whole history of peoples from Puerto Rico but includes the larger culture of the Puerto Rican people and includes contemporary artists evolving into that sort of framework and finally evolves beyond the Puerto Rican community to all the Latino community.' I had that whole vision, I certainly had enough education to arrive at that visioning. And he said, 'OK.'

I spent one year gathering all sorts of things, Arawak dictionaries, went to Puerto Rico and shot the poorest people in the barrios and their culture and Puerto Rico had the tin shacks right alongside the big hotels. I grew; I had to move from his office where he gave me this big space where I started the library. I was busy researching, getting all of the elements together, anthropological, sociological, cultural, etcetera.

PR: So the museum was firstly about the content and not about the containment?

RMO: Exactly, it was about the content, because for me it was very clear, you can have the container but if you don't have content what are you going to do just fill it up with anything?

I was angry at the fact that folk culture was seen as less of value to the larger more evolved culture, simply out of racism.

'A messy bunch of masochists with a sadistic boss'

THE OTHER CULTURE CONTINUED

Japanese Underground, the local *Flaming Creatures*. But the censors have been at it and Adachi considers it ruined. "It seems like a cheap sex movie now," he says. "That's just the opposite of what it was—an argument against the idea that sex is necessary to eroticism. The girl in the film has no sex but the boy loves her anyway. The point of this is that obscenity enters with the girl's gratuitous wish for a sex like everyone else's."

Adachi glares as the Zero dancers strip, shakes his head despairingly as 12 naked dancers fling themselves into a pile of sawdust to receive a pillow-whipping from Kato, their boss. Lighted candles protrude from several bottoms, dripping globs of hot wax. A grave girl in a black leather coat mounts a stepladder above the boys and begins tossing eggs

down on them. The eggs do not break at first, and the girl hurls them harder and harder, leaving egg-shaped welts; one of the boys sobs into the sawdust as eggs assail him. "This kind of people—I can't even describe them," Adachi says. "They're a messy bunch of masochists with a sadistic boss. I'm getting ready for a good punch-out, and I've got the gang from *No-Sex* here to pitch in. That would be a real Happening—getting these bare bottoms out into the street and kicking them around a little."

Hijikata is more forbearing. Even when the Zeroes light fumigation bombs that fill the crowded room with balsam smoke so thick that the prone dancers disappear under a noxious white cloud, he smiles tolerantly, like a father at Games Day. "I think what they're doing is interesting, as far as it goes," he says carefully, "but it's so superficial I can hardly believe it." Yokoo smiles

and coughs, nods his head yes, yes. Adachi begins throwing Coke bottles out the third-floor window "to express the natural hostility I feel against the voyeur"—in this case the crowd queued up in the street below, waiting to get in.

All windows are flung open but still the smoke is too thick to bear. The crowd pushes through French doors to a cold terrace, and soon the Zeroes themselves give up and come out into the weather, stepping barefoot on the pebbled asphalt, a couple of candles burning gamely still. Kato points out the dark, imposing silhouette of Fujiyama, a rarely seen eminence of shadow behind the jagged black Tokyo skyline. "Seeing Fuji-san makes this a real Happening," he says in high humor. "Do they have Happenings this good in New York or Paris?"

NEW YORK, January 1966
Ed Sanders has been arrested—it was only a question of time. Sanders is a poet, a thorny presence to the police. He is 27, the leader



of a body-rock singing group called the Fugs and the proprietor of the Peace Eye Book Store, a foxhole for psychic revolutionaries on the Lower East Side. But mainly Sanders is notorious as editor and publisher of a poetry journal whose cheerily obscene name provokes in the reader a revealing crisis: can he, will he, speak it out?—or is he the prisoner of what Sanders calls "the

*He was
overwhelmed, he
said, 'I just asked
for a project and
you bring me a
museum.'*

PR: In a way, it was like a portable museum...

RMO: From that first place I had to move because the Puerto Rican community was not a major demographic in Barrio Viejo. Barrio Viejo was essentially an African American community and the community, certainly within its political right, was asking for more money to be spent on its project. I felt that before any of the politics got out of hand between the Latino and African American community, that it'd be best to take the *Museo* and move it. I packed it all into the truck, all the boxes all the research and everything and I went to Barrio Nuevo and spoke to the superintendent there and he sent me to a school over by the East River, this big huge space where he gave me four rooms. I started making trips to Puerto Rico and getting some paintings and some anthropological objects, some Santeria stuff, some Taino objects and slowly moving into the next stage of the *Museo*.

Later the politics started impacting on me in that community because there was a group that wanted to take over the whole thing. To protect myself, what I did do was get the Museo del Barrio incorporated, under my name with my own board. So the community committee led by this particular person

decided the way to do it was to have a community meeting in which I would have to make a presentation and she would make a presentation. She was fluent in Spanish and I have a second grade level in Spanish, she was educated she was working on her Doctorate at the time and was interested in keeping the *Museo* at this kind of folk, craft level. So anyway, she was wearing this very folk outfit, the muumuu with the cloth top kind of thing and she spoke very eloquently about the African roots of Puerto Rico and the Arawak and meanwhile I'm talking about an exhibition I already had at the Museum of Natural History where they invited me to put on an exhibition and I did *Boricua aqui y alla*. She got lots of news coverage and upset a lot of the middle class Puerto Ricans because I was focusing on giving integrity to the culture of the underclass; the folk. So they were all upset, 'but there are doctors and there are lawyers!' 'Of course,' I said, 'I know there are doctors and lawyers, but that's not her point.' The underclass, just like me, saw that their vision of themselves was not to remain poor generation after generation.

So I went into the meeting with a media presentation I made at the Museum of Natural History which was really successful. I had three screens and it was made up of panoramic views and I



Completing their project in creative vandalism, Ralph Ortiz (left) and Paul Pierrot put the last blows to a Victorian piano in a London backyard.

emotional and sexual maladies of the race," what others might call "good taste"?

Sanders began publishing four years ago and at first he operated from a floating mail drop, distributing his mimeographed journal free and by hand. But as his list of contributors grew to include the likes of W. H. Auden, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen and Norman Mailer—

causing a half-dozen universities to subscribe despite the impossible title—Sanders assumed it was safe to surface at the Peace Eye. Wrong. The police strike, confiscate all copies of the magazine, charge Sanders with outrageous public decency. Free on bail, Sanders sends out an appeal to friendly addresses in Europe and the U.S., warning friends in the movement that he is about to be

"freaked off the scene" by the authorities. Then, settling down at the Peace Eye, looking vigorous and happy in GI-surplus clothes and blond Zapata mustache, Sanders tells about his arrest—for him a classic study in cultural hypocrisy:

"The cops were rolling around on the floor in the station house, screaming with laughter. All these cops, reading these big bundles of magazines they'd taken out of my store, and here I am in the next room being interrogated by the cancer cop who arrested me. He kept showing me things from the magazines and, trembling with rage, he'd say, 'What about this? Is this O.K.?' And I'd say, 'Well, certainly. And, sir, if you'll turn the page you'll see a poem by the associate curator of the Museum of Modern Art which is a perfectly valid literary work.' I told him that as soon as I got out I would have a big party and invite him to it. And I meant it—I mean it. I think the best thing

to do with cops is to subtly instruct and teach them. Hating them doesn't do any good. You have to work with them. You have to try to be as gentle as possible and instruct them through example and discussion."

All the same, Sanders' magazine was a true test of any censor's cool. With extravagant profanity—high-board double-gainers of profanity—he came out for free love in the streets, for "dope law defiance" and the protest-boarding of nuclear submarines. Like a young, unsubdued Allen Ginsberg, Sanders was becoming something of a guru. So the police reached out and snuffed him—or tried to. Even with a criminal charge pending against him, Sanders is calm in the knowledge that the American Civil Liberties Union will not be alone in his defense. The opinions of at least two Supreme Court justices approximate his absolutist notion of free expression, and to judge from the shelves of many popular bookstores, the tide is running fast in his favor; every day it gets more difficult to say something obscene.

On the other hand, every day it gets easier to turn on. The drugs—marijuana and especially LSD

did a lot of the photography, I did the editing, I did the music. I found all of this music from the beginning of conch shell blowing and the sunset rising and the jungle, everything from the forest atmosphere to the explosions in the Spanish conquest to baptisms, weddings etc. It was great. Outside I had works from Las Casas on the brutality of the Spanish in their invasion, so brutal that Spanish embassy had called and said that they couldn't show it, but there it was at the Museum of Natural History.

So with that show under my belt, I talked about the importance of this exhibition going throughout the country in Puerto Rican and Latino communities, that through the media we could get objects from all over the world without having to move them, without having to go through all that expense of packing and sending objects. Here I am talking about new technology and class mobility, and of course they said, who is this guy? He wants to destroy us, and that's essentially what she was implying. So they voted for her to be the director.

PR: So tell me more about this quest for dignity in the art—regardless of your background—and how it translated into your participation in the protest against the MoMA.

Well the protest at MoMA was simply an extension of artwork as coalition. It had to do with cultural issues and the role of artists within culture and the role of certain institutions supporting certain expressions of certain groups over others. But those are just issues of bigotry, whether it's women not being taken seriously as artists, whether it's minorities not being taken seriously as artists. I think there's something more complex than not being taken seriously, it had to do with not wanting to share the notion of progress with other groups.

In other words, if you have a big breakthrough and you talk about the contributions that American artists are making to art on this planet, what kind of radical invention is coming from America, whether its art or automobiles? We know the European-Americans, the Anglo-Americans are making contributions, but what about all the other artists who are not Anglo, what about Latinos, Puerto Ricans, all the women in the arts? There were also certain sociological concerns, that the artist should have insurance, that some of the artists don't have steady jobs, you're packing a cab, or you're a waiter, or you're a waitress, or you're living with your parents, not making any money from your art. So how can the artist be protected within that framework?

*Here I am
talking about new
technology and class
mobility, and of
course they said,
'who is this guy?
He wants to destroy
us!'*

"The Other Culture," *Life Magazine*, February, 1967.



I think there's something more complex than not being taken seriously, it had to do with not wanting to share the notion of progress with other groups.



Top & Bottom: Artist Worker's Coalition Demonstration, 1970-71. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Photo: Jan Van Raay

SELECTIONS FROM THE ARCHIVE OF RAPHAEL MONTAÑEZ ORTIZ

1

The Destructivist Manifesto

Ralph Ortiz 1957-1962

There is a movement afoot now which is unique in art history. Some artists are destroying a movement which separates the maker from the unmaker, the constructor from the destructivist. We are the destroyers, we are materialists, we are sensualists, we deal with process directly. We do not play at God's happy game of creation. It is not the trauma of birth which concerns us. There is no need for magic in living. It is the dying which needs transcendence. The power of death and destruction prevails. The artist above all understands the desperate need to retain unconscious integrity. We realize that our screams behind a quiet face is in service of death and inevitably kills itself making no noise - giving no warning. We were going to give warning, our screams of anguish and anger will contort our faces and bodies. Our actions will make sounds that will reach Heaven and Hell. That which is made will be unmade that which is constructed will be destructed and will no longer serve. Our sense of destruction will no longer be turned inward in fear. Our art will purge us it will give us strength we will prevail over death and destruction.

DESTRUCTIVISM : A MANIFESTO (1962)

There are today throughout the world a handful of artists working in a way which is truly unique in art history. There is an art which separates the makers from the unmakers, the assemblers from the disassemblers, the constructors from the destructors. These artists are destroyers, materialists, and sensualists dealing with process directly. These artists are destructivists and do not pretend to play at God's happy game of creation; on the

contrary, theirs is a response to the pervading will to kill. It is not the trauma of birth which concerns the destructivist. He understands that there is no need for magic in living. It is one's sense of death which needs the life-giving nourishment of transcendental ritual. We who use the process of destruction understand above all the desperate need to retain unconscious integrity. We point to ourselves and confess, shouting the revelation, that

(2)

~~From the point of view of god it~~
 it is not dying that is transcendent but the
 ability to ^{symbolically} sacrifice that permits for salvation
 in that God by ~~expressed~~ ^{expressed} anger and
 anguish in terms of a loving sacrifice
 in a qualitative ^{way} that is ^{by killing} Christ's body repressed and
 way the repressed ^{the} desire to annihilate all mankind
 and so it is understandable that this act would
 awaken such reverence, for it speaks of God's
 fortunate gift of compromise ^{in terms of destruction}
 aesthetic of Christianity is that in ^{the} ^{actual} ^{act} of man
 is the symbolic sacrifice it performed in
 the most ^{realistic} primitive tradition. ~~It is~~ ^{It is} much
 more sophisticated or perhaps I should say civilized
 as a symbol of loving sacrifice. ^{of course}
 one could ^{lose} ^{sight} of the ^{goal} and ^{purpose} of the ^{sacrifice}
 essentially, what occurs is, that a
 symbolic act is performed with a symbolic object
 for a symbolic purposes ~~which was~~ ^{which} initiated
 by the need to maintain ^{symbolic} unconscious integrity.
 of course at this point one must question what
 possibilities exist for ^{the} achieving ^{of} this unconscious integrity ^{and what are} its dynamics
 150 million people ^{could} be sacrificed
 the megapole ^{the} ^{gives} ^{the} ^{profits} ^{to} ^{the} ^{city}
 New York, Chicago and San Francisco 15m about
 just one man and one woman, do perhaps a new born babe
 150 million lambs - two buffaloes - a two year old chipmunk
 stuffed and placed on the mantle, two butterflies pinned
 to a board we could just stick pins in a doll

anger and anguish which hide behind the quiet face is in service of death, a death which is more than spiritual. The artist must give warning, his struggle make a noise, it must be a signal. Our screams of anguish and anger will contort our faces and bodies, our shouts will be "to hell with death", our actions will make a noise that will shake the heavens and hell. Of this stuff our art will be, that which is made will be

unmade, that which is assembled will be disassembled, that which is constructed will be destroyed. The artist will cease to be the lackey, his process will cease to be burdened by a morality which only has meaning in reality. The artist's sense of destruction will no longer be turned inward in fear. The art that utilizes the destructive processes will purge, for as it gives death, so it will give to life.

Transcendence is for the living, not for the dead. It is the symbolic sacrifice that releases one from the weight of guilt, fear and anguish. It is the sacrificial action which releases and raises one to the heights. The sacrificial process in art is one in which a symbolic act is performed with symbolic objects for symbolic purposes, initiated by the need to maintain unconscious integrity.

3

65
68
69
72

45
- 68
- 85

The dynamics are a thousand eyes for an eye
 Boils death and destruction and suffering for the
 trespasser; maybe not now, maybe not
 today but ^{some} day by God, I'll get even. even if I have to
~~live~~ I get headaches colds ulcers T.B.
 Cancer, heart attacks ^{sleep may wake up off a roof} ~~at some day~~ just
 you wait and see I'll get even "Every dog has his day"
 And when the ^{real} dog has ~~the~~ ^{real} day what will he
 really do - push a button and annihilate 200 million
 people, push an old lady down the stairs
 join the Ku Klux Klan Expose his privates
 in public Walk the dog to defecate on the
 neighbor's lawn ~~and walk~~ ~~but this is not reality~~ - this is reality
~~is extended~~ ~~shows real situations~~ ~~occurs~~ ~~real objects~~
~~do battle~~ ~~in real situations~~ ~~that~~ ~~real~~ ~~things~~ ~~are~~ ~~being~~ ~~done~~
~~blood~~ ~~is~~ ~~shed~~ ~~real~~ ~~injuries~~ ~~have~~ ~~real~~ ~~bruises~~ ~~real~~ ~~where~~
 kicks ~~like~~ a real dog, a real curse rings in
 real ears ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~real~~ ~~ear~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~
~~seen~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~real~~ ~~child~~ ~~driven~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~real~~ ~~driver~~
 who does not ~~kill~~ ~~the~~ ~~real~~ ~~child~~ ~~who~~ ~~in~~ ~~turn~~ ~~does~~ ~~not~~
 really see the real car while crossing the real street is
 really killed really dead. the police drew a ~~white~~ chalk line
 around him and covered him with a white sheet
 I didn't really do anything I just watched I didn't
 even get ~~really~~ sick I didn't even throw up I
 just got really afraid the car was ~~hard~~ ^{hard} it
 was made of steel, but I'll get even some day.

The dynamics of our unconscious integrity is fantastic. It arranges content in terms of a thousand eyes for an eye, boils death and destruction for the trespasser, maybe not now, maybe not today, but some day, by God, we'll get even, even if it means headaches, allergies, ulcers, heart attacks, or a jump off a roof. Just you wait and see. Someday we'll all get even. "Every dog has his day", and when the real dog has his real day, what will he really do?

Will he push a button to annihilate 200 million people, push an old lady down the stairs, join the Ku Klux Klan, expose his privates in public, or simply walk the dog to defecate on the neighbor's lawn? When the need for unconscious integrity is actually worked out in the actual world with actual people, actual things occur. There is actual conflict and actual destruction. The real moving car driven by the real driver who does not really see the

real child who in turn does not really see the real car while crossing the real street, is really killed, really dead. The police cover him up with a real white sheet and draw a white chalk line around him. I didn't do anything. I just watched. I didn't even get sick. I didn't even throw up. I just got really afraid. The car was big and made of steel, but I'll get even some day. There are other real possibilities, less drastic ones, possibilities which have a more essential

(3) A

There are other real possibilities ~~and by~~
~~this process~~ possibilities that are symbolically
distant. The real car might have run over
a real puppy or with greater symbolic
distance a real cardboard box. The real
child might have been bumped by a push
cart or an other ~~kind~~ ^{child} on ^{collaps} ~~photos~~.

(3) B

more distant

Symbolic distance is the process whereby
man is displaced by that which is on a
~~more~~ ^{more} ~~distant~~ ^{distant} ~~level~~ ^{level} ~~of~~ ^{of} the evolutionary ladder, ~~the~~
symbolic distance increasing both quantitatively
and qualitatively as one descends. There is a
hierarchy of displacements ^{such as} within the particular categories ^{to}
well as within the total evolutionary ^{in the particular categories} ~~plan~~ ^{one can}
shift from man to ^{one animal} ~~beast~~ ^{another form} ~~plant~~ ^{and} ~~mineral~~ ^{shift} ~~to~~ ^{to}
~~beast~~ ^{modest} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ terms of the total evolutionary ^{scale} ~~plan~~ ^{and}
~~to~~ ^{to} a further shift displacement ^{level} ~~to~~ ^{higher} ~~plant~~ ^{into} ~~and~~ ^{the} ~~mineral~~ ^{category}
~~to~~ ^{to} a plant and from ~~plant~~ ^{to} a stone
therefore vegetable and then mineral. Whether it
be within the particular categories themselves or the
total ^{evolutionary} ~~plan~~ the shift from the animate to the
inanimate is an essential constant ^{the creation of} ~~for~~ ^{distance}
~~that~~ ^{it is clear} ~~of~~ ^{inherent} ~~the~~ ⁱⁿ ~~process~~ ⁱⁿ ~~of~~ ^{the} ~~artistic~~ ^{fact} ~~experience~~ ^{that}
~~is~~ ^{also} ~~inherent~~ ^{inherent} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~artistic~~ ^{artistic} ~~experience~~ ^{experience}
~~there~~ ^{there} ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~also~~ ^{also} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~problem~~ ^{problem} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~too~~ ^{too} ~~much~~ ^{much} ~~distance~~ ^{distance} ~~it~~ ^{it}
~~is~~ ^{is} ~~the~~ ^{the}

displacement, a greater distance. The real car might have run over a real puppy with still greater symbolic distance, a real cardboard box. The real child might have simply bumped into a parked car, bruising himself slightly, or crashed his toy car into one of his toy dolls.

Just as displacement and distance are essential and necessary artistic means which enable the artist to submerge himself in the chaos of his destructive

internal life and achieve an artistic experience, so too it is essential that the encounter between the artist and his material be close and direct. The artist must utilize processes which are inherent in the deep unconscious life, processes which will necessarily produce a regression into chaos and destruction.

A displacement and parallel process exists between man and the objects he makes. Man, like the objects he makes,

is himself a result of transforming processes. It is therefore not difficult to comprehend how as a mattress or other man-made object is released from and transcends its logically determined form through destruction, an artist, led by associations and experiences resulting from his destruction of the man-made objects, is also released from and transcends his logical self.

DESTRUCTION ART SURVIVAL KIT

by Ralph Ortiz 1968

This Destruction Art Survival Kit is a serious attempt to help you understand your ability to be violent as well as resolve your hesitancy and inability to express your violence within an art-symbolic framework.

This art event is not intended to pacify social anguish nor is it intended to subvert those energies to be used to accomplish necessary and obvious social changes. What this Destruction Realization Kit may do is save your life. If used properly it will resolve those angry headaches and backaches. Your violent spasms extreme and subtle will be artistically displaced. You will be able to gain time to construct a life supportive ^{means} means of communication between you and your enemy.

Destruction Realizations are simply a beginning perhaps misguided seemingly simplistic, but a beginning in aesthetic probes into a behavioral realm as mysterious and shocking for us today as sex was to the Victorians.

Destruction in nature is a fact beyond question. There is atomic fission and atomic fusion. Our antibody antigene system~~x~~ which protects us against disease wages endless war with those foreign germs and viruses it is programmed to violently destroy. We breathe and destroy micro cosmic universes. We destroy food to digest it. Our body cells are destroyed as we grow. If we could see closeups of these endless violent processes and hear their unending violent ~~xxxxxxxx~~ sounds, we would to say the least die of battle fatigue at very early ages. It is not unreasonable that we as part of this vast cosmos with its violent processes also naturally behave violently. Violence is the behavioral possibility which has placed humankind in jeopardy since the beginning.

Our natural urge to violence must be explored and understood within a framework that will not threaten ours and civilizations physical or emotional survival.

DESTRUCTION ART SURVIVAL KIT (1968)

By exploring those emotional possibilities in which our urge to violence is acted in through our headaches, ulcers and suicides or acted out in our social delinquency, bigotry and murder, mankind will gain a necessary advantage for survival a reasonable psychological advantage in behavioral possibilities.

Destruction Realization Art with its role playing and psychodramatic process prepares one via the investment of violent emotion and violent content through symbolic people, objects, situations and events for those real behavioral choices which are constructive and life supportive. The behavioral advantage is gained only when we have integrated our depersonalized violent behavioral possibilities.

As you glance through the kit punching or cutting out the characters, animals, objects and birds begin to invest them with emotion and content. Begin to make up your story of violence, Who will do what violence to whom for what life negating reason. Explore reasons carefully the more absurdly logical the better. It will help to write it all down. If you get bogged down, extend a situation or invent another situation of violence. Only by exploring all your possible violent causes and violent effects will this survival kit begin to perform its function. Set up the characters, animals, objects and birds. Never let up the violence of your story. Invest violent emotion and violent content, each step of the way. Give each character a history of violence, each animal, object and bird it to be a history of violent cause and violent effect.

When you are satisfied with the reasons for your violence, proceed with the Symbolic Destruction Realization, gouge what has to be gouged, stab what has to be stabbed, mangle and break what has to be mangled and broken, become the attacker and the attacked person, animal, object or bird, You are all of them. You will make all the sounds, the grunts, the screams, the roars and the hisses. You will verbalize the particular reason for the particular destruction, such as "Henry, you bastard, you got the job I was suppose to have gotten"..."This lion cut-out is me, Growl, growl, I will ~~x~~ rip your

arm off. I will break your bloody neck, growl, growl."

Then as Henry, you might verbalize, "You Fucking Lion, this Tarzan cut-out is me. I'm going to split you in two with my trusty blade." "Ah, an, my arm, the pain, growl, growl, ahh, ahh," etc., etc., elaborate the violence, extend it, write it all down.

When the entire Destruction Kit is finally a pile of ripped and mangled cardboard as a consequence of your violenceability, rate yourself. If you are surprised by your violenceability, your ability to construe absurdly logical reasons for your violence, the extremeness of your violent situations and your extreme involvement in the sounds and actions, then you have taken the first steps in survival. You have begun to personalize your violenceability. Those of you ~~xxxx~~ who were not surprised during or after the destruction of the kit or were bored with it or refuse to join in the Destruction Realization at all have a particular resistance to giving up your despersonalized hostility, perhaps you feel that you will be helpless if you give up your secret hostility.

I suggest that those who are especially resistant perform the Destruction Realization in a supportive group, each person projecting his violent content and emotion through a particular character, animal, object or bird. The group should help each other realize and invest their violent emotions and content in a serious verbal as well as totally dramatic way.

A Destruction Realization group is more sensitive to those who are truly surprised by their violenceability. Surprise is the response to a recognition which could lead to insight and a behavior modification which is advantageous and life supportive, only active involvement will permit for surprises.

However, you choose to be violent alone or in a group, remember it's better to destroy this kit than the whole kaboodle.





Participants in the Destruction in Art Symposium, London, 1966. Photo: John Prosser.

D.I.A.S. DESTRUCTION IN ART SYMPOSIUM (1966)

RECOLLECTIONS

DIAS

By Ralph Ortiz

It began with a phone call from my psychiatrist friend's wife, the photographer Dena; Her message was to call Al Hansen. Al spoke of destruction finally getting its break. Mario Amaya had sent invitations to all artists who are involved in destruction to send material to him in London. He would devote the August 1966 issue of Art and Artists to destruction in art.

Within a week I had sent my article to Mario. It was essentially the Destructivist Manifesto I had written in 1960. Soon after, a letter arrived from Gustav Metzger - he had seen what I had sent Mario and wrote to ask me to accept his invitation to the Destruction in Art Symposium to be held in London during September of 1966.

For days after the invitation, fragmented thoughts relating to destruction in art spiralled in my head: Cavemen gouged spear holes in huge bear and bison sculpture - Sacrificial offerings - War and cannibal feasts - Suicide and black magic - Royal stag hunts, bull fights, boxing and the A.S.P.C.A. Leonardo da Vinci and his war machines - Van Gogh's ear - Drowning mink and mink coats - Goya in the field drawing mutilated bodies - Arieti and art as paleoprocess - Freud's Id concepts and Destruction art as death-wish process - Bettelheim and mutilation - Destruction art as a symbolic wound -

Lorenz On Aggression - Destruction art as survival art - Ardrey's African Genesis and Destruction art as predator art.

Of course, the challenge is clear, and the banner we waved in London reads that art is the only activity through which a civilization can realize its most visceral aspects without threatening its survival.

Anna Lockwood of Australia revealed plans of destruction with ultrasonic vibrations. More names were read into the roster of participating artists, making it absolutely clear that destruction is an international phenomenon: Yoko Ono of Japan, Wolf Vostell of Germany, Pro Diaz of Brazil - 18 countries represented by over 24 artists.

Gustav gave the cue for all to move upstairs. The London press was to get a first-hand view of an Ortiz destruction. I climbed the stairs to the large recreation room, the press close on my heels. A small group playing billiards stopped to watch as I threw an overstuffed chair from the seating area to the center of the room. I was on it immediately and did not stop until it was demolished. The newspapers that evening and the following morning revealed the Destruction in Art Symposium as an historical event.

On August 31, 11a.m. London time, some five artists and ten press people crowded a small reception room of Saint Bride's Institute. Metzger behind a massive desk presided over the conference. The press seemed receptive and interested:

During the second day of the Symposium American ABC-TV informed me of their interest in the Symposium and its American participants. They wanted to film some of the dialogue and an American destruction event.

On September 15 in another part of London, ABC filmed my Piano Destruction Concert and interviewed me. The film was shipped to America and on September 19, television America became aware of the goings on of DIAS in London.

The 6th was the day I performed a piano destruction concert for the BBC-1 24 hour news program.

The 12th of September was the of the Conway Hall Concert

My event, a Paper Bag Destruction Concert, commenced when the audience began to blow up and explode as quickly as possible the one hundred paper bags each had been given. The explosive popping, paper throwing, and general pandemonium which comprised my concert lasted some 20 minutes.

The night of September 22, at the Mercury Theater, I was on stage doing a symbolic regression: a "self destruction!" To an increasingly anguished, angry calling for mother and then father, I tore all my clothes off. Then to a sensual "mommy" and then "daddy", I sprinkled baby powder in the air around me and diapered

myself. I then played with a large duck which I squeezed to a happy "mommy" and bashed to an angry "daddy", until it was shattered. This is followed by a hungry, breathless swallowing of six pints of milk, and with each gasp of breath, I cried out an exhilarated "mommy!" As I became full with milk I anxiously and then angrily began to shout again for my mommy, pounding a bottle between my legs on the stage up and down in anger until I achieve a hysteria which drives me to reject my mommy by vomiting the milk I had consumed. Retching my stomach empty I crawl off stage, searching, crying "mommy, mommy." It is essential that the audience participate as directly as possible in this destruction realization by being given an opportunity to follow along, duplicating those steps that they are prepared to come to terms with.

The 25th was the day of the I.C.A. post-mortem. The panel: Jascia Riechart (critic), Ivor Davies (demolition), Al Hansen (happener), Gustav Metzger (auto destructor), John Sharkey (poet), and myself. We were later joined by Yoko Ono. We argued, agreed, disagreed, refined, defined, and answered questions like, "What distinguishes the criminal from the destructionist artist?" The panel generally agreed that for the criminal, only society can be his "studio." As a result, the criminal's aggressive, destructive urges can only result in crime. The artist, on the other hand, makes a clear distinction between aggressive destructive action in reality and its necessary symbolic displacement. The criminal burglarizes someone else's house, the artist burglarizes his own. Jascia could not come to terms with us and questioned destruction as art. The only agreement I could have with her is that the artists who were participating in DIAS were not destructive enough for one to gain the impact of the destruction aesthetic as distinct from the constructive.

It is because art is the unreal reality that it can become the means by which to further humanize our species. By bridging the gap between the good and the evil, destruction art absorbs our evolutionary limitations, safeguarding our biological and psychological survival.

DIARY OF A RITUAL

by Ralph Ortiz

Ralph Ortiz

Destruction Theater - Ace Gallery
Los Angeles, California - Hollywood - Beverly Hills

I was far above freezing New York, far above its blanket of poisonous filth. It was January 22nd and I was flying easier on that Jet airline that broils its own steaks.

The idea of performing a Destruction Theater spectacle in Los Angeles, home of "Mystical Hollywood", in the midst of its own Cecil B. deMille spectacle of floods and mud slides made me anxious. I pictured John Noah Huston blowing his flute by his mammoth plastic Ark on a flooding freeway, beckoning Volkswagens, Buicks, and Chevies two by two up into the Ark to safety.

The landing was like the express elevator. I embarked into an overcast Los Angeles. My tropical genes vibed a hello at the Date, Banana, Palm and Coconut trees. My political genes grinned at the future of all patriots as I passed a series of Minute Man gasoline stations. The bus ride ended and a cab brought me to the door of the Ace Gallery. English-accented Paula greeted me with a smile and led me past the office area to the gallery space where my Destruction Ritual would take place. In the center of the some 40 x 80 feet of gallery sat the piano I would destroy in concert. It was a pink upright -- a purchase from the Hollywood Salvation Army. Toney, the Ace Gallery carpenter and Guy Friday in residence, volunteered to play Melancholy

**DIARY OF A
RITUAL
(1969)**

Baby". He walked over to the piano and began pounding keys, but nothing happened. The keys didn't budge -- they were frozen in place. I checked the inside of the piano. There were no hammers or strings, all of the insides were gone -- it was like it had had a hysterectomy. The piano was a prop. Fortunately, I had arrived in Los Angeles two days prior to my performance (In case, right?).

I went over the outline of the performance with Paula to be sure she understood what things and people I needed. Paula mistakenly had the script of the August, 1968 Vancouver, Canada Rites, believing it was to be used in Los Angeles. So I sat Paula down with a pencil and pad and started from the beginning.

I would need ten slaughtered chickens with feathers and heads intact; 250 live white mice; 250 baited mousetraps; ten gallons of blood; one thousand paper bags; one upright, fully playable piano; one working phonograph; one long playing recording of Spanish classical piano; ten pairs of scissors; 30 people; one long-handled single-bladed four pound ax and 400 paper cups.

I divided the some 40 x 80 feet of gallery space into five 20-foot square performance areas, the piano and phonograph to be painted white and placed in the central area; the 250 baited mousetraps to be placed in a 12 x 12 foot, 18-inch high fenced arena in the rear center of the gallery; three 7-foot wide, 15-foot long screens to be hung 9 inches apart in depth off the left wall as one enters the gallery for the Brain Projection Lobotomy. The Clothes Pressing Burning is to take place in an area 15 feet in front of the Lobotomy. The rear right corner of the gallery is to be the arena area for the smashing against the wall of the dismembered chicken parts, the Ritual blood throwing and Clothes Tearing. All areas except the Lobotomy area are to be brightly lit.

The script for the Los Angeles Destruction Theater Rites is as follows:

The 30 people that will work directly with me will be Initiators. The audience, on the other hand, are the initiates. Six Initiators will occupy each performance or Initiating area -- two Initiators each with a dead, fully-feathered, head-intact chicken and four Initiator-Blood Distributors who demand that the Audience-Initiates take cups of blood from them and throw the blood at the Initiators performing Destructions.

Those Initiators initiating with chickens are to work against each other ventilating hostility at each other through the Initiate-Audience, always keeping the Initiate-Audience between them, while they perform their Destruction Actions.

In order to be admitted to the Destruction Ritual, the audience-Initiates must accept a Live White Mouse which then becomes their possession to do with as they please (to kill or let live).

The Destruction Ritual begins with the ten Initiators with chickens loudly yelling a non-verbal hostile yell -- AAAAAAHHHH -- to be repeated over and over till the end of the clothes-tearing. As a cue to all Initiators, I begin the Rite with hostile, aggressive AAAAAAHHHH's and begin violently tearing feathers from the chicken carcass keeping Initiates between myself and my opponent Initiator. I wildly throw handful of feathers after handfully of feathers at him -- he keeps escaping, as I do, behind the Audience-Initiates who keep milling away from us, shaking off the feathers, their hands held up in front of them to protect them -- many run for the exit.





Destruction Theater, 1969, Hollywood, CA. at Ace Gallery. Photo: Irwin Glaser.

The gallery is echoing with screams and AAAAAHHH's. The pungent smell of chicken flesh becomes a part of everything as chicken skin tears off with the feathers. Initiators attack each other with the carcasses, smashing chicken against chicken, sometimes against each other. Pushing against the audience, swinging the chickens in wide arcs at every turn, the scattering Audience-Initiates are caught in the middle of Destruction actions. Some Initiates pick feathers and flesh off the floor and throw them back at us; others push back; others run for the exit. AAAAAHHHing, I grab one of the legs of the chicken my opponent Initiator is flailing at me. His eyes wide, AAAAAHHHing, he grabs a leg of my chicken and we begin to violently pull and tug till there is the sound of gristle and flesh tearing. We deliberately fall against Initiates who push us and run from us to avoid the smell and wetness of intestines and blood falling from the bowels of the dismembered chickens. As each two Initiators working with chickens dismember them in the tug of war, they chase each other to the Blood Throwing area and smash the dismembered parts against the wall till all ten chicken Initiators are in the area AAAAAHHHing and smashing dismembered parts against the walls. At this point in the Ritual, the Blood Distributors demand in a direct, loud and hostile way that the voyeuring, goddamn Audience-Initiates stop voyeuring and throw Blood or get the hell out! Some Initiates spill the blood on the floor; others throw it at up, cup and all. I give the cue to begin the Initiators blood-throwing by picking up one of the some 100 cups full of blood along the walls of the Blood-Throwing arena. Continuing the earlier conflict, each Initiator and his opponent, while AAAAAHHHing, heave cup after cup of blood at

each other, but this time instead of forcing the Initiate Audience into the center of the action, the other Actor-Initiators force each other into the center of the action.

I caught sight of my opponent and heaved my cup of blood. The blood soaked the chest and heads of three Initiators and the legs of two Audience-Initiates. The Initiates ran back. I turned to be greeted by a pint of blood flying at my face; it filled my eyes, nose and mouth. My AAAAAHHH became a gurgle -- I could barely see my opponent. Initiates ran up to us AAAAAHHHHing -- throwing blood. The Art Critic, Kurt Von Meyer, came close -- very close -- threw his cup of blood and joined us. He grabbed a cup of Blood from the floor, AAAAAHHHed and flung it full force at me, past me into the crowd of Initiates who scattered for safety. I an another Initiator grabbed him (this was the cue for the Clothes Ripping). I ripped his jacket sleeves and pockets and began to work on his shirt. Von Meyer grabbed my belt and pants pocket as he spun off his feet, ripping my pants to the knee. Someone pulled my shirt collar from behind, choking me -- buttons popped -- my shirt was in shreds. We were all at each other's clothes, ripping and AAAAAHHHHing -- we were a mass of rags and blood.

I gave the cue to kick, bang and pound the walls. For two minutes the wall was our opponent. One of the Initiators kicked through the wall. I gave the cue for the catatonic stance. We took grotesque, anguished poses. Blood dripping from my torn clothing, I left the ragged, bloody statues.

As I made my way through the crowd of Initiates, I thought of the difficulty the Initiators would have holding the grotesque poses till I completed the Piano Destruction Concert and returned to them with the live white mice for the Mousetrap Event. As I passed the Sheet Burning, I realized it was a failure. I couldn't smell the burning of fabric. I was told the irons wouldn't get hot enough. I shouted "Make a fire, god damn it!".

The Lobotomy was moving along well. Lobe after bloody lobe fell away under the cutting hands of the Initiate surgeons. The slide projection of the human brain was in bloody living color, an awesome huge convoluted myth of a brain being slowly sliced to the floor. Blood poured from cups into the incisions as they were made.

I came out from behind the Lobotomy with the ax and made my way to the phonograph, now playing the Spanish piano Concerto LP. Most of the Audience-Initiates didn't seem to be aware of what I was about to do. In their midst, I raised the ax high over my head. Initiates scurried in all directions. With a violent AAAAAHHH, I smashed the phonograph, leaving it in a shattered heap. I began the White Piano Destruction concert. The keys (black and white) clunked and pinged as the ax splintered them across the ritual space. Some Initiates dared come close enough to throw blood. It ran through the piano and onto the floor, sanctifying the concert as carnage.

I ripped off a long bloody shred of shirt interfering with my ax swing, wiped blood from my hands, kicked the piano over and continued the musical massacre. Each ax smash brought a shriek and groan, as bloody dismembered parts scattered. I don't remember how many ax swings had passed before the harp lay before me naked, free of its piano. Like an Arch Angel I played the wrath of God. Each

smash of the steel ax blade snapping harp strings sending out the sounds of thunder in a shower of sparks.

Near the end of the concert, the ax blade splintered off its handle. I threw it into the heap of wood, cast iron and wire which had now become Fallout Sculpture. The Audience-Initiates began to mill around the wreckage collecting fallout souvenirs, smashing fragments underfoot.

I picked up the box of live white mice put aside in the gallery office for the "Mouse Feed". I said nothing as I walked staring straight ahead past "The Lobotomy", past the "Piano Carcass" to the catatonic Actor-Initiators.

The blood was beginning to dry; our faces and arms were a mass of scabs. I handed each Actor-Initiator a wriggling mouse. I then led them to the mousetrap arena. We surrounded the arena and with loud, viscious, vengeful laughter each placed our wriggling mouse into the arena. Still laughing loudly, we began slamming our palms and fists against the walls of the arena. The hungry mice scurried in all directions, many nibbled at the bait in the traps, only to be guillotined. Some Audience-Initiates followed us throwing their mice into the arena. Many had already preceded us; there were some sixty mice trapped, some dead, some dying.

An Audience-Initiate jumped into the arena and began rescuing mice. With both hands, he threw mice out of the arena, at the same time setting off as many traps as he could with his feet, stomping all he could reach. Tragically, in his haste, he stomped many untrapped mice. Another Initiate soon joined us in the rescue. I led the exit of the Initiators through a door behind the Mouse Trap arena. The Ritual was near its end.

We made our way to a bathroom where, for about a half hour in a central circular cold water communal sink we scrubbed clotting blood from our bodies. My ear still rang from a collision with a chicken in the hands of an over-zealous Initiator. One Initiator, his eyes inflamed, complained of a reaction to the blood as he rinsed it out of his eyes. I held my blood-soaked head under a faucet waiting for the red water to become clear. My head was in a bloody tub of splashing bloody arms and legs, feeding red into swirls being sucked down gurgling drains.

The Ritual ended when the water, having washed all of the blood, drained clear.

No more than five minutes had passed since we had washed and changed clothing when the Los Angeles police arrived. They were impressive, with hard hats, gold badges and gold bullets. They had come to investigate a complaint of screams, murder, blood, gore and cruelty. They immediately questioned one of the Initiators. She was stooping on the floor looking over her nine month belly, searching for an earring. They asked "Are you all right?" She said "Yes". She had wrapped her hair to dry in a towel, the towel had blood on it. "Are you sure you're O.K.?" She said "Yes, I'm O.K.". "What's that on the towel? Is it blood?" "Yeah, it's blood", she answered. With that they looked quickly at all of us and then into the gallery space. "What's that stuff all over the walls and floor?" Someone answered "Blood!" They responded "What!!" Someone repeated "Blood".

Putting their hands on their holsters, they stared into the gallery space and in unison said "You're kidding". Entering the

gallery they asked "Who runs this place?" Someone pointed to Doug Christmas. He was dressed in white, blood covered the side of his face and head. "What's that all over the walls and the floor and on those people and on your face and head?" they asked. Doug answered "Blood".

"How did it get there?" Doug explained that it was theater, Destruction Theater. They warned photographers not to take their photos.

Detectives arrived, asked more questions and took down names and addresses. A police photographer chased a mouse around the gallery, cornered it, placed an identification card next to it and snapped its photo. The L. A. police did a thorough job. It became clear that the Ace Gallery had, after all, only presented a bloody, factual fiction of that bloody fictional fact we call reality.

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RAPHAEL MONTAÑEZ ORTÍZ

LASER/DISC/SCRATCH/DESTRUCTION

Curated by Pedro Reyes

April 5th | May 21st

